DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 285 870 SP 029 364

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TITLE The Relation of Career Preference and Gender to Attitudes Toward Change.
PUB DATE Mar 87
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Washington, DC, April 20-24, 1987).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adoption (Ideas); *College Students; *Comparative Analysis; Education Majors; Higher Education; Law Students; Medical Students; Nursing Education; *Professional Occupations; Sex Differences; *Student Attitudes

ABSTRACT

A study compared the attitudes toward change held by students preparing for careers as teachers, nurses, medical doctors, and lawyers. It was hypothesized that: (1) education majors are less likely to be open to change than other students; (2) education and nursing ("semi-professions") majors are less likely to be open to change than other students; and (3) there are no significant differences in males' and females' attitudes toward change. Fifty students in each of the four majors at New York area universities completed a profile in the Adjective Check List, involving 300 adjectives an adjectival and 37 attitudinal scales. Statistical analysis of responses indicated that education majors were more open to change than at least one other group on every significant dependent measure but two. "Semi-professional" students were more alike in their collective attitudes toward change and less open to change than were their counterparts. No significant differences were found between males' and females' attitudes toward change. (CB)

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Over the last several years, the American public's perception of our nation's schools as institutions in need of substantial improvement has combined with a number of demographic and economic factors to encourage calls for educational change. Citing trends such as low standardized test scores, the absence of demanding academic standards and drug use by students as evidence of the need to introduce changes in our schools, a series of wide ranging proposals have been put forward to suggest ways in which our public schools may be improved. These sometimes contradictory proposals, if implemented even in part, will require sweeping changes in current educational practice.

The issue of change in an educational setting is a complicated topic not only because there are several schools of thought on how change might best be implemented, but because the literature on the topic suggests that various factors specifically related to education may frustrate change in the field. While some researchers have maintained that the "semi-professional" status of teachers may curtail educational innovation, others have suggested that personality is a prime determinant of an individual's occupational preference and that this may shape their attitudes toward change. Still others have engaged in a spirited debate over the impact of gender on education, with some researchers suggesting that attitudes

toward change can be directly related to the large number of females employed in the field.

Education and Gender

The topic of gender as a research variable in education has had, according to one contemporary researcher, the effect of revealing "more about social values toward women (in American society) than of the women occupying this (teaching) role". (Bicklen, 1983, p. 3) As early as 1959, Lieberman recognized a positive relationship between teachers' low status and prejudicial attitudes toward women. At that time, he suggested that "a cultural revolution concerning the role of women in American society" would be necessary in order to upgrade the professional status of education. (Lieberman, 1959, p. 7) While we are presently in the midst of the cultural revolution that Lieberman (1959) foresaw, the literature examining the relationship between education and gender must be reviewed in terms of what has been referred to as the "old" and "new" scholarship on women's roles in education.

Perhaps one of the best known disciples of the "old" scholarship on this issue is Lortie (1969) who cited a series of factors which, in his opinion, attracted women to careers in education. Without the benefit of supporting data, he suggested that the localized nature of the hiring process in education makes teaching more accessible to women who, in his words, have been "relatively immobile members of the work

force". (Lortie, 1969, p. 22) He also noted that the work schedule of a teacher coincides with those hours during which a woman's own children may be in school. He concludes by suggesting that, "in our society, as in most, the care of small children is culturally defined as women's work". (Lortie, 1969, p. 22)

Etzioni (1969) adds a somewhat different dimension to this perspective by suggesting that because women are generally less conscious of organizational status than men, they have been more amenable to administrative control. He summarizes his position by stating that:

> It is difficult to determine if the semi-professional organizations have taken the form they have because of the high percentage of female employees, or if they recruit females because of organizational reasons; in all likelihood, these factors support each other. (Etzioni, 1969, p. xv)

The work of Simpson and Simpson (1969) reflects a similar tact. Using statistics similar to those reported in 1981 by the National Center for Education Statistics (women make up almost 70% of America's public education work force, 86% on the elementary level), they claim that teaching could not be considered a profession because it contained such a large number of women.

A number of related points were addressed in a study of

the career aspirations and achievements of a group of female college students as seniors and again seven years after graduation. Almquist, Angrist and Mickelsen (1980) tested Holland's (1966) theory of occupational choice, which predicts that college students tend to pursue the career for which they prepared. They hypothesized that Holland's theory may not apply to women because women frequently have to juggle career and family responsibilities, because women tend to give priority status to their families and because female college graduates tend to marry high income men who are mobile, thus preventing the women's pursuit of a career. Results indicated that while the respondents married and had children less than anticipated, the women changed the particular career for which they prepared in college more frequently than anticipated.

Other adherents of the "old" scholarship on the issue cite both the low occupational commitment of women and a tendency to act in a subordinate manner in the work place as gender related qualities. Grambs (1957) suggested that a teacher is a "person en route". For men, this meant a step up the career ladder and for women, this meant marriage and an exit from the profession. Hall (1966) noted that women see teaching as "something they can slip into, and step out of, as it suits their interests in their homes and/or families". (Hall, 1966,

p. 35) Dreeben (1970) observed that because women tend to act in a "subordinate" manner, the large number of women in the educational work force may affect the organizational nature of schools and encourage educational personnel to resist innovative practices.

More recent researchers assert that the "old" scholarship examined women's roles in education in a framework which accepted women as individuals who were predominantly family centered, as pliable, subordinate and deferent members of the organizational hierarchy and as interested in work only as a matter of personal and financial convenience. In essence, these "new" researchers contend that the "old" scholarship was misleading because it was based upon the belief that a woman's primary role was that of a child's caretaker and upon the stereotypical assumption about women that career and family life posed mutually exclusive alternatives for women.

The traditional view of women as acquiescent and uncommitted members of the work force was challenged by the work of Salleh and Lalljee (1969) who found that men and women are not dissimilar in their work motivations, job involvement, level of job satisfaction and perception of conflict between the demands of work and home. These findings were substantiated in a study by Marrett (1972) who noted

that when controlled for job level, education and age, the work expectations of men and women are not significantly different. Taking strong exception to the belief that women are not committed to their work, Epstein (1976) concluded that constraints upon a woman's career advancement possibilities are based more upon the belief than upon the fact that women lack career committment.

Feldberg and Glenn (1979) noted that many occupational sociologists have handled the work of men and women differently. Expressing criticism of the orientation which saw the primary role of the male as the breadwinner and the primary role of the female as the mother, they suggested that these roles ignore significant aspects of workers' lives both at home and on the job. Grandjean and Bernal (1979) studied the work orientations of male and female parochial school teachers to see if women favored a more structured organizational environment, were more interpersonally oriented and were less interested in the intrinsic aspects of their work than were their male counterparts. The data they generated revealed that while male and female respondents showed the same concerns for the extrinsic and intrinsic aspects of their work and that their work orientations were remarkably similar, women considered professional autonomy more important than men and men were more concerned with keeping students under control.

The factors which determine job satisfaction for male and female workers were the focus of a study by Miller (1980). While she concluded that the actual job conditions, not gender, have the greatest impact upon job satisfaction, one gender difference was described as dramatic:

> It seems to be the autonomy associated with complex work that produces job satisfaction for men. For women, complex work does not necessarily imply autonomy; their subjective rewards come from the challenge and interest inherent in the tasks themselves, not freedom from control. (Miller, 1980, p. 363)

In effect, the "new" scholarship on women has revealed that when researchers study human actions by focusing on male behavior and then relate those results to the study of women, "we may find ourselves measuring something other than what we had planned". (Bicklen, 1983, p. 9) Consequently, one of the goals of this study is to provide additional data to put an end to this debate on the gender issue.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to compare the attitudes toward change held by students preparing for careers as teachers, nurses, medical doctors and lawyers. Student groups were chosen not only because a number of studies have established a positive relationship between personality and occupational preference, but because student groups would hopefully minimize a number of problems that would have been posed by using practitioners in these fields, including age, experiential and socio-economic biases. Basic questions raised in the literature related to the occupational preference, professional status and gender of individuals in these four fields translated into three hypotheses:

1. Education majors are less likely to be open to change than students majoring in nursing, pre-medical and pre-law programs;

2. Students preparing for careers in the so called "semi-professions" of education and nursing are less likely to be open to change than students preparing for careers in more traditional professions as medical doctors and lawyers;

3. There are no significant differences in males' and females' attitudes toward change.

The Study Sample

A sample of 200 students, made up of at least 50 students in each of the four selected occupational preference fields,

was drawn from a population of juniors and seniors attending several Long Island, New York area universities. Whereas Hofstra University provided all of the education respondents and the majority of both pre-medical and pre-law students, it was necessary to utilize students from the State University at Stony Brook, Adelphi University and St. John's University to complete the pre-medical and pre-law samples. The entire sample of nursing respondents were students enrolled at Molloy College. Only students who had declared majors in these four fields were used for the study.

The Instrument

The instrument used in this study was the two page profile format of the Adjective Check List.(Gough & Heilbrun, 1983) Made up of 300 adjectives and adjectival phrases commonly used to describe an individual's personal characteristics and/or attitudes, respondents are instructed to check those words or phrases which they feel are most self descriptive. Each of the 300 adjectives has been assigned to one or more of the 37 scales that measure different attitudes. For this study, only nine of the 37 scales were selected as measures of respondents' attitudes toward change. Chosen primarily on the basis of the positive and negative descriptors listed for each scale, the nine selected measures are those of communality, achievement nurturance, autonomy, change, abasement, counseling-readiness, self-confidence and adapted child. While high scores on six of these dependent measures -- autonomy, change, abasement,

counseling-readiness, self-confidence and adapted child -- identify respondents as individuals open to change in their lives, low scores on the three remaining scales of communality, achievement and nurturance are likewise indicative of an individual who is open to change.

The Pre-Test

A pre-test was conducted using a limited sample of students in each of the four selected occupational preference fields. The intent of the pre-test was to identify and correct potential problems before embarking on the full scale study, not to collect and analyze data for future comparison. As such, three areas of concern surfaced during this phase of the project. First, the limited availability of male respondents in the nursing and education samples was noted. A second consideration related to the scoring of completed instruments. Because the hand scoring process used at this time was tedious and prone to error, a faster and more reliable scoring method was sought. The third issue dealt with the manner in which an acceptable response rate would be insured. In this regard, two groups were created. While one group received related materials via a mail survey, a second group was asked to complete the test instrument in a classroom setting.

Having identified these problems, it was decided that

a statistical solution would be employed to deal with the first problem--the limited number of males in the nursing and education samples. As such, the more conservative or "classical" approach (which adjusts each sum of squares as well as each main effect for every other main effect) was used to compensate for these unbalanced cells. The availability of computer scored answer sheets for the Adjective Check List eliminated the second problem associated with tedious and error prone hand scoring. While the third problem, insuring an adequate number of cooperative respondents, was solved by using a "captive audience" of students in a classroom setting, the failure to select respondents randomly is acknowledged as a limitation of this study.

The Study

The use of a "captive audience" as a means of data collection required the establishment of contacts with advisors and faculty members at targeted universities. Completed instruments were gathered in two phases over a period of six months. After examining each completed instrument to insure respondent anonymity, the 200 completed protocols were mailed to the Consulting Psychologists Press in Palo Alto, California in May, 1986. Upon their return, the reliability of each instrument was established, standard scores were recorded and coded, a data file was created and computer analysis of the data was begun in July, 1986.

The Statistical Analysis

A 2 X 4 multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to test the stated hypotheses. The first independent variable was gender. The second independent variable--occupational preference field--was composed of four levels: college juniors and seniors majoring in education, nursing, pre-medical and pre-law programs. A total of nine dependent variables was examined, each reflecting attitudes toward change as measured by the selected Adjective Check List scales.

The procedure planned for this analysis was to test first the interaction effect of gender and occupational preference field, followed by tests of the main effects for occupational preference field and gender. If the data established that the main effect for occupational preference field proved significant, it would then be possible to conduct a multiple comparison combining the "semi-professional" fields of education and nursing against the traditional professional groups of medical doctors and lawyers.

The results of these analyses determined that the interaction effect of gender and occupational preference field was not significant (Λ = .83155, f = 1.29919, df = 27.00 and 538.02, p = .145) Because this interaction effect upon attitudes toward change did not prove significant, an examination of each main effect was undertaken.

Like the interaction effect, the tested main effect for

gender was not significant (Λ = .97456, f = .53374, df = 9.00 and 184, p = .849). However, the tested main effect for occupational preference field was significant (Λ = .71385, f = 2.43789, df = 27.00 and 538.02, p = .000) with approximately 28% of the variability in the dependent measures accounted for by this effect.

While univariate test results for the main effect of occupational preference field identified six of the nine dependent variables as being significant, an examination of the discriminant functions for this main effect indicated that only the first two were significant and meaningful accounting for approximately 16% and 12% of the variability respectively. In summary, pre-law students registered scores which identified them as being most open to change. Education majors however ranked ahead of nursing and pre-medical students on several scales thereby denying support for the first hypothesis that education majors would be less open to change than their counterparts in the sample.

Because the effect of occupational preference field was significant, the last analysis combined the "semi-professional" fields of education and nursing majors and measured them against the combination of pre-medical and pre-law respondents. Scheffe and Tukey post hoc comparisons revealed that education, nursing and pre-law respondents were more alike in their collective attitudes toward change than the "semi-professional" and professional designations in the literature would suggest. As such, support for the second hypothesis did not exist.

Findings of the Study

The results of this study disprove the first hypothesis, raise serious questions about the second and fully support the third hypothesis posed in this study. More specifically, in testing if education majors are less open to change than students in the nursing, pre-medical and pre-law samples, results ranked education majors more open to change than at least one other group on every significant dependent measure but two. On the eight significant scales, education majors ranked first (most open to change) on three scales, second on two scales, third on one of the scales and last (least open to change) on two scales. While it is interesting to note that the three scales on which education majors ranked first are scales which identify individuals who are described as anxious to avoid conflict or confrontation, the fact remains that education majors are not less open to change than students in other samples.

The hypothesis which suggested that the "semi-professional" samples of education and nursing majors are less open to change than the traditional professional groupings of pre-medical and pre-law students was neither fully supported nor completely rejected. Whereas post hoc comparisons suggested that education, nursing and pre-law respondents were more alike in their collective attitudes toward change than their

pre-medical counterparts, the education and nursing "semi-professionals" were more similar in their attitudes toward change than dissimilar.

The third hypothesis which stated that there are no significant differences in males' and females' attitudes toward change was fully supported by the data. In effect, the basic arguments put forth by adherents of the "old" scholarship on the gender issue were again laid to rest. Although the data generated in this study only pertain to attitudes toward change, they support the views of Salleh and Lalljee (1969) and Marrett (1972) that the orientations of males and females are not dissimilar. The same can be said for the point raised by Grandjean and Bernal (1979) that men and women share many of the same intrinsic and extrinsic concerns. Perhaps most applicable is the argument raised by Epstein (1976) that differences between men and women in the work place are based more upon the belief than the fact that differences do exist.

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